

'I think the things you say in your book are challenging ...'

Oh yes, page VI: "**Mission statement:** *I like to think things through thoroughly; I wish to inspire readers to think about things as they never thought about them before. I trust my writings are thought provoking and a conversation starter*" ... and I know they are challenging.

'... how can you say 'while it is a fact that there is no God ...' no-one knows!'

Yeah, this is a big one; *'it is a fact that there is no God'* is a tendentious notion to rationalise (this is regarding reality and fact; I'll talk about belief in a minute) ... importantly, we first need to answer the question: *'What do you mean by God?'* See my essay GOD 1. However, to come to the realization that there is no God who interferes in our lives and tells us what to do or not to do is necessary for a move forward in respect of world peace (see REALITY 1).

Some philosophers say, "to be an agnostic is a cop-out". And of course, it is impossible to prove the non-existence of anything (see CELESTIAL TEAPOT); but to say *'it is a fact that there is no God'* is a challenging statement indeed ... and what follows will only appeal to rational thinkers, the *thinking-things-through-thoroughly* types.

The rationalization goes like this: It has been tried a million times to convince atheists that there is a God, and all attempts failed, because there is no proof; but any fact requires proof. So one can say, the likelihood that there is no (factual, rational) God is 99.999999 percent ... which may satisfy the agnostic; but in terms of rationalism it can be rounded up to 100 percent.

In any case, it is up to the religiously inclined to come up with proof that God exists - it is not up to the atheist to prove His non-existence ... we need not have a proof God does not exist in order to justify atheism. Atheism is obligatory in the absence of any evidence for God's existence; indeed, the absence of proof satisfies the atheist that there is no God.

I like to say *'everybody (who thinks this through thoroughly) knows'* that a God does not exist; while *'no-one knows'* if a God exists. So, as facts go, it is clear there is no - let me say it again: no *factual* - God; but as regards beliefs, anything goes. I tackle this issue many times in this book.

I've heard it said, "I know God exists because I can see the good He does". Dear pastor, the good you see done is due to people's belief in God (and, I may add, so is much of the bad being done); it is not due to an imaginary, interventionist God.

see also RELIGION 1

Now, of course this logical rationale has nothing to do with people's beliefs and their right to believe in anything, including their version of God (see GOD 1). But the dichotomy to reconcile is: Belief vs. Reality (and fact). In a Q & A debate featuring scientist Richard Dawkins vs. the very glib cardinal George Pell (see GOD 6 as well as my blog 977), Pell obfuscated the distinction with references to how his beliefs are based in historical, pre-Enlightenment - dare I say medieval - definitions of the 'reality' of God, proving Pell's thinking as well and truly stuck in the Dark Ages. 'Alternative facts' are a stock-in-trade for religions and were invented long before Donald Trump.

I feel strongly about the issue ... for the simple reason that with all organised religions (at least the three Abrahamic ones, especially Christianity) how can the supposition 'there is a God' have any claim to truth, as we're dealing with a belief system that is built on deceit, lies and falsehoods (nobody was born of a virgin, performed miracles or arose from the dead; see SCRIPTURE). So, for the good of humanity and world peace, atheism is the way (again, see REALITY 1).

But then there is - of course - the notion of, *'always bear in mind the principle of uncertainty'* (from page VI of my book, as well as - an important point there - in my 'To Do List for this life'). Your homework is to come to terms with this apparent contradiction (hint: No dogmas).

Cheers, C.

985 What shall we tell the children? ... an email exchange

My blog 984: Should parents be allowed to enforce religion on their children? elicited this question from a reader:

My question to you is - how does your view on this translate to those children who simply grow up in their parent's religion by sheer osmosis? By this I mean, the kids go to church with their parents, they celebrate the religious days, etc but the parents do not make any attempt to influence their kids with it ... do you think this is a subliminal form of indoctrination as well?

The answer is an uncomfortable: Yes.

Do you think the parents should make a conscious effort to remove their children from their religious activities once they can understand a basic grasp of it?

Probably not, as long as parents help their children to inform themselves - age appropriately - about other religions, as well as secularity; but the important part is that parents should not be dogmatic about their religion toward their children. And that is probably difficult for many parents who feel strongly about their religious culture, because Christianity - like most others - is soaked in dogmata. But I believe religious culture does not necessarily have to be dogmatic. I do believe one can enjoy the 'trappings' of religion - the festivities, the singing, the community - without falling into the trap of dogmatic and intolerant indoctrination; at least I hope so.

... but the parents do not make any attempt to influence their kids with it ...

I believe the influencing happens by stealth. At church the kids will be subject to a degree of indoctrination ... which they have no defenses against (Richard Dawkins: The God Delusion).

In my essay GOD 3 I say it is important children are taught ethics at school, instead of scripture. And then they may join a religion at age 14, or so. However, that of course is fought against tooth and nail by the religious hierarchies. As the famous saying goes: *"Give us a child till s/he's seven, and we'll have them for life."* (The Jesuit maxim; see my blog 984.) The formative years are hugely important for religious indoctrination, because it is possible that well educated children at age 14 will not join a religion, or - indeed - may not remain in the religion they were brought up in. I was 14 when I excommunicated myself ... see my essay MISSIONARIES.

I think once children are ten, twelve, fourteen years old, they are probably ready for an education based on facts and science as well as tolerance and syncretism. I think at that age children may add to earlier questions like: is Santa real? The tooth fairy? about God and Jesus. Are they real? Parents must think about what to say when those questions come up. I believe it is a great responsibility when bringing up children to tell them the truth. Of course it is easy to say ... "oh, that's just what we believe."

In the video *What Shall We Tell The Children?* on my carstenburmeister.com/unity.aspx page, the professor answers: Science. Whatever you talk to your kids about ... bear science in mind.

So, what about God? Is He real? Well, yes ... if you define God as the good in us, as compassion, understanding, wisdom, truthfulness, love etc. And what about Jesus? Jesus adds to the above humility and forgiveness. See GOD 2 and JESUS.

But if you define God as the being up in heaven who tells us how to live our lives ... what about the suicide bomber who shouts out the very last words you'll hear: "Allahu Akbar" (God is great)?

Nevertheless, with all I have said, let me point out my essay GOD 4. It's one of my favourites re: religion, God and beliefs. Don't miss the story about the two priests discussing if God exists. So, remember the footnote at the very bottom ...

A 45 year old regular church-goer said "when I was in my teens I was called to confirm my belief in a traditional God, the virgin birth and the resurrection of Christ. I said to the minister 'I just think this is all rubbish' and he replied "well, you know, I think you're right.""

... obviously it is possible not to believe the nonsense that forms part of the indoctrination agenda of religions, but at the same time enjoy being part of a supportive religious community. And I make this brazen claim: It really doesn't matter which religious community one belongs to ... as long as it is tolerant and peaceful; preferably with the absence of any proselytizing.

Cheers, C.

Carsten Burmeister's Blog

This is the email exchange that forms the background to the previous two pages

W. is a friend and an editor. After we met for the first time and I found out she was an editor I asked if she would like to have a look at my essays. We started talking about my book, both in emails and in person, in the beginning of 2019. She quickly got enthusiastic about reading it in-between work assignments and in April '19 we got to this stage:

Hi Carsten

I think you are at the point with your book that structurally, there is no further improvements that can be made. I found it readable, easy to follow and it logically makes sense; some observations:

- *I found the italicized text hard to read as it's quite light - the use of italics is fine as it distinguishes between your words and those of other sources, but I would suggest making the font darker so it's easier to see/read.*

This point is very pertinent, it has been made before. In the beginning I always bore in mind that my book would ultimately be printed in offset and the grey type would be a solid second colour, rather than rasterised black; right now, with the digital printing process I have to contend with, I don't have a solution ... I tried using a darker colour (I'm using 50% black) but it didn't work for me; I like the strong difference between the two sections.

- *The use of illustrations are a great visual feast for the eyes, adding context and character to your words - for example, on page 4. If you can find more illustrations for more of the work, I think it would really jazz it up.*

There was a point where I had many more illustrations (photos) until Jan pointed out that they could be copyrighted. I tried to get permissions, for instance for using the drawing on page 4, but I didn't receive a response; so I deleted a fair few photos (a point in question, I had a great shot of the Rolling Stones, from the year I talk about in the essay, but I felt I had to delete it).

- *Your blog section (the appendix) - needs paragraphs as it's hard-going-reading getting through it.*

Agreed ... can't do it, haven't got enough space; I would have to shorten the text, but that's already cut down from the original blogs (it sometimes is hard work abridging the blogs). And I also want to emphasize the difference between my essays and the appendix (but I'll do it for 'your' pages!).

It was not until we had been talking and emailing for quite a while, that I received the email at the top of page XXXIV and I learned then that W. is a believer ... in God and in Jesus Christ. I was flabbergasted ... how can a believer possibly like my book? This was always a point I was bearing in mind ... that I might be excluding about 50% of the population from my potential reader pool. Then this week (Dec. 2019) we arrived at this email exchange:

Dear W.,

your latest note is remarkable: *Your book is always an experience for me every time I open it.* It spawned a lengthy talk between Jan and myself. *I very much enjoy it.* The gist of our talk was: Why are there not hundreds of thousands of people feeling that way? *That's why I have to get back into it!* Well, that is the reason for its existence, its format, its style: One can easily put it down, leave it, ponder its content, get back into it.

People ask me: "Who do you write for?" You know, I never thought my book would be much of a success with a 'true believer', someone who is Christian, with an staunch belief in God and Jesus; a belief that I am after all ardently critical of.

In principle - I trust that is what you pick up in my writings - I am in favour of BELIEF (as long as it is tolerant and peaceful), it often gives us valuable communities and potentially inner peace; and FAITH, which can give us strength (read the footnote about Desmond Doss).

So, back to my question: "*Why aren't there hundreds of thousands of people feeling that way?*" That of course is my heartache. Why oh why?! In 2017 I spent \$13k on publicizing my book ... a press release was sent to over two thousand English speaking media all over the world. The reaction? Zilch. None. Nil. Zero. Nothing ... Yet, I'm hopeful.

I trust there are many more people out there who one day will say: *Your book is always an experience for me every time I open it ... I very much enjoy it. That's why I have to get back into it!*

And they will tell their friends, who will tell their friends ...